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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF BEHAVIOR NORMS AND SOME OF THEIR RAMIFICATIONS IN A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE.

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DESCRIPTORS- *COLLEGE STUDENTS, *ATTITUDES, *VALUES, STUDENT COLLEGE RELATIONSHIP, *COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT, CHANGING ATTITUDES,

THE OBJECT OF THIS STUDY WAS TO DISCOVER WHAT CHANGES, IF ANY, OCCUR IN THE ATTITUDES, VALUES, AND ORIENTATIONS TO LIFE OF AMERICAN YOUTH AS THEY PROCEED THROUGH THE FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE. THE TARGET POPULATION WAS 183 MEMBERS OF THE 1960-61 FRESHMEN CLASS OF A SMALL MENNONITE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN A MIDWESTERN STATE. THE CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL MODEL FOR NORMS DEVELOPED BY JACKSON IN 1960 (USED TO DESCRIBE AND MEASURE CHARACTERISTICS OF, AND CHANGES IN, THE NORMS FOR NINE SELECTED TYPES OF BEHAVIOR, EACH CONCEIVED AS A SEPARATE DIMENSION) WAS ADMINISTERED TO THESE STUDENTS FIVE TIMES OVER A FOUR-YEAR PERIOD. THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS ARE BASED ON THE RESPONSES OF THE 26 MALE AND THE 17 FEMALE STUDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN ALL PHASES OF THE STUDY--(1) THE IDEAL OR MOST PREFERRED BEHAVIOR WAS HIGHLY STABLE OVER THE COURSE OF THE STUDY, (2) INTENSITY OF FEELING ABOUT ALL BEHAVIOR DECREASED IN A STEP-WISE FASHION DURING THE STUDY, THE SINGLE PERIOD OF GREATEST CHANGE BEING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THE FRESHMAN YEAR, (3) PRE-ACQUAINTANCE NORMATIVE SIMILARITY RELATED SIGNIFICANTLY TO SUBSEQUENT INFORMAL INTERPERSONAL ASSOCIATIONS, AND (4) STUDENTS WHO REMAINED THROUGH THE JUNIOR YEAR WERE LESS DIVERGENT FROM THE MEAN RESPONSES OF THE TOTAL GROUP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FRESHMAN YEAR THAN THOSE STUDENTS WHO LEFT BEFORE COMPLETING THEIR JUNIOR YEAR. (RD)

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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF BEHAVIOR NORMS AND SOME OF THEIR RAMIFICATIONS IN A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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What changes, if any, occur in the attitudes, values and orientations to life of American youth as they proceed through the four year college experience? This question has been debated warmly in recent years. Studies carried out at the Center for the Study of Higher Education (Webster et al., 1962) resemble a number of pre-World War II studies (e.g., Burgemeister, 1940; Kuhlen, 1941; Arsenian, 1943) in showing generally a slight change in the direction of greater liberalism and sophistication in political, social, and religious outlooks. In contrast, Jacob (1957) in a controversial report surveying a large number of studies concluded that there were few significant changes in values during the college years.

The equivocal nature of our knowledge in this area may derive from a variety of factors. However, apparently contradictory research findings and conclusions can be resolved frequently by modified concepts and more refined methods. The study reported here used a two-dimensional model for conceptualizing and measuring norms for behavior in a student class. Evidence will be presented that certain characteristics of these norms were relatively stable, while others changed systematically during the first three years of college. Additional findings point to some of the consequences of norm correspondence or disparity among students and suggest some of the processes which regulate student interaction and behavior.

Method

Population and Setting. The subjects of this study were the 183 members of the 1960-61 freshman class of a small Mennonite liberal arts college in a Midwestern state. Originating in the 16th Century during the Protestant Reformation, Mennonites have traditionally emphasized certain standards of behavior, believed to be consistent with Biblical teachings. The following nine classes of behavior were selected for the present study: card playing, Sunday School attendance, dancing, private devotions and meditation, drinking, smoking, church attendance, swearing, and pacifism.

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Procedures: The conceptual and operational model for norms developed by Jackson (1960) called the "return potential model" was used to describe and measure characteristics of and changes in the norms for these nine types of behavior, each conceived as a separate dimension. The model describes the feelings of approval or disapproval a person would elicit from other group members if he were to behave in designated ways. In representing a behavioral norm, the means of responses by group members are plotted in the two-dimensional space formed by a behavior dimension and an evaluation dimension, as indicated in Figure 1. The "return potential curve" thus constructed represents the distribution of approval and disapproval over an entire behavioral continuum. This curve and its relatively precisely measured characteristics are coordinated to the theoretical concept norm and related properties of norms.

The same return potential model instrument was administered 1) during freshman orientation preceding enrollment, 2) 3 months after the beginning of the freshman year, and near the end of the 3) sophomore, 4) junior, and 5) senior years. Only the first four administrations will be reported here as the senior year data have not yet been analyzed. The results to be presented are based on those 26 male and 17 female students who responded at each of the first four administrations of the instrument.

Results

The successive return potential curves for each of the 9 behavior areas are presented in Figures 2-10. Inspection of the Figures indicates that, with a very slight exception in the case of "card playing", the most preferred or ideal behavior remained constant through the junior year. Empirical investigations of values generally link the concept of value to manifestations of preferred behavior (Wilson and Nye, 1966). It thus might be argued that within this Mennonite liberal arts college the values underlying the behaviors in question did not change from the freshman through the junior year.

However, the intensity of feeling, both for approved and disapproved behaviors, generally decreased progressively over the 3 years as indicated in the changing shapes of the return potential curves. An analysis of variance was performed on the data for each of the 9 behavior areas, using a repeated measurement, Sex (2) by Administration (4) by Behavior Position (5) design. Changes in the shapes of the curves are reflected in the Administration by Behavior Position interaction component of variance. In each of the 9 analyses this component was significant at less than the .05 level.

Thus, while the evidence suggests stability in the underlying value structure of these students, the step-wise decreases in the intensity of feelings regarding the behaviors suggests the attenuation of norms having a potentiality for regulating the student behaviors. These dual findings would appear consistent both with Jacob's contention of an absence of change in college student values and with the apparent contrary conclusions by others that greater liberalization of student orientations occur, for example, Kuhlen's (1941) reference to a "sloughing off of early disapprovals". To this we may add evidence of an equal "sloughing off" of "early approvals".

It may be noted that the greatest changes occurred in the period of the first 3 months of the freshman year. This initial relatively rapid rate of change coincides with findings of the Vassar College studies on changes in personality characteristics (Webster et al., p. 832), and with the examination by Wallace (1966) of changes in student attitudes toward achievement.

The significance of the behavior norms for the day to day living among the students is reflected in several additional findings.

1. Students whose norms were similar before acquaintance subsequently were more likely to spend leisure time together than were those whose norms were dissimilar. Sociometric data on reported associations were gathered 3 months after the beginning of the freshman year. It was found that similarity of persons within sociometric clusters, using the first administration behavior norm data, was greater than could have been expected on the basis of chance (Glick, 1962). Thus, one indication of the significance of norms is in the demonstrated effect of normative similarity on the selection of leisure time associates.

2. Students who left the college before completing the junior year were characterized by greater normative deviance at the time of their arrival on campus than were those students who remained. This finding was reflected in 2 separate analyses.

a) Using the first administration data, D^2 scores with the elevation component removed (Cronbach, 1953) were calculated for all students on each of the 9 behavior areas. These scores were based on difference between an individual's profile or return potential curve and that constituted by the means of the total population. Analysis of variance indicated that the D^2 for "dropouts" were significantly larger ($p < .025$) than for "stayins" (Glick, 1963).

b) Again using the first administration data, an index of intensity of feeling was calculated for each student on each behavior area. This was done by taking the mean response from the indifference point over the five behavior positions. An interesting sex by dropout-stayin interaction was found in the analysis of these scores. Male "dropouts" had relatively low intensity scores while female "dropouts" had relatively high scores ($t = 6.36$; $p < .01$). Male and female "stayins" did not differ in intensity ($t = 1.87$; ns). Thus in the overall distribution of intensity scores males were distributed toward the low end of the scale, females toward the high end. The probability of leaving the college was greater for those with initially either low or high intensity than for those with moderate intensity.

Thus, the importance of the norms for the students and student life on campus is again indicated, this time by the relatively high probability of students who were deviant with respect to the norms to leave the campus. This finding also suggests the operation of informal social influence processes in the form of pressures on deviant group members to conform to a "middle of the road" position.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings reported here from this longitudinal study of behavior norms in one class of students may be summarized as follows:

1. The ideal or most preferred behavior was highly stable over the 3 years of the study covered by this report.

2. The intensity of feeling about both approved and disapproved behaviors decreased in step wise fashion over the three years, the single period of greatest change being the first 3 months of the freshman year.

3. Preacquaintance normative similarity was found to relate significantly to subsequent informal interpersonal associations.

4. Students who remained at the college through the junior year were found to be less divergent from the mean responses of the total group at the beginning of the freshman year than were those students who left the college sometime before completing the junior year.

Characteristics of the model used for the investigation of norms made it possible to discover on the one hand stability in the ideal or most preferred behavior but, on the other, systematic changes over time in intensity. Conceptual and methodological distinctions

incorporated in the model, it is suggested, may be useful in resolving apparently contradictory conclusions regarding changes in college students.

The last two findings cited indicate the importance of the norms investigated for social interaction processes among the students and for behavior such as remaining in the college or leaving. The latter finding should be considered tentative since no other conditions known to have consequences for dropping out were controlled in the analysis.

The study is limited by the usual restrictions of single case studies. It is also limited in not allowing for direct interpretations in terms of causes of the observed changes. However, further analyses of data already gathered will focus on revealing possible inter-dependencies between informal social interaction processes and changes or stabilities in normative characteristics. The study does indicate that our understanding of student social behavior will be enhanced by further studies of the norms for behaviors that are important to students.

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Handout to Accompany Presentation of "A Longitudinal Study of Behavior Norms and Some of Their Ramifications in a Small Liberal Arts College"

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Supplement

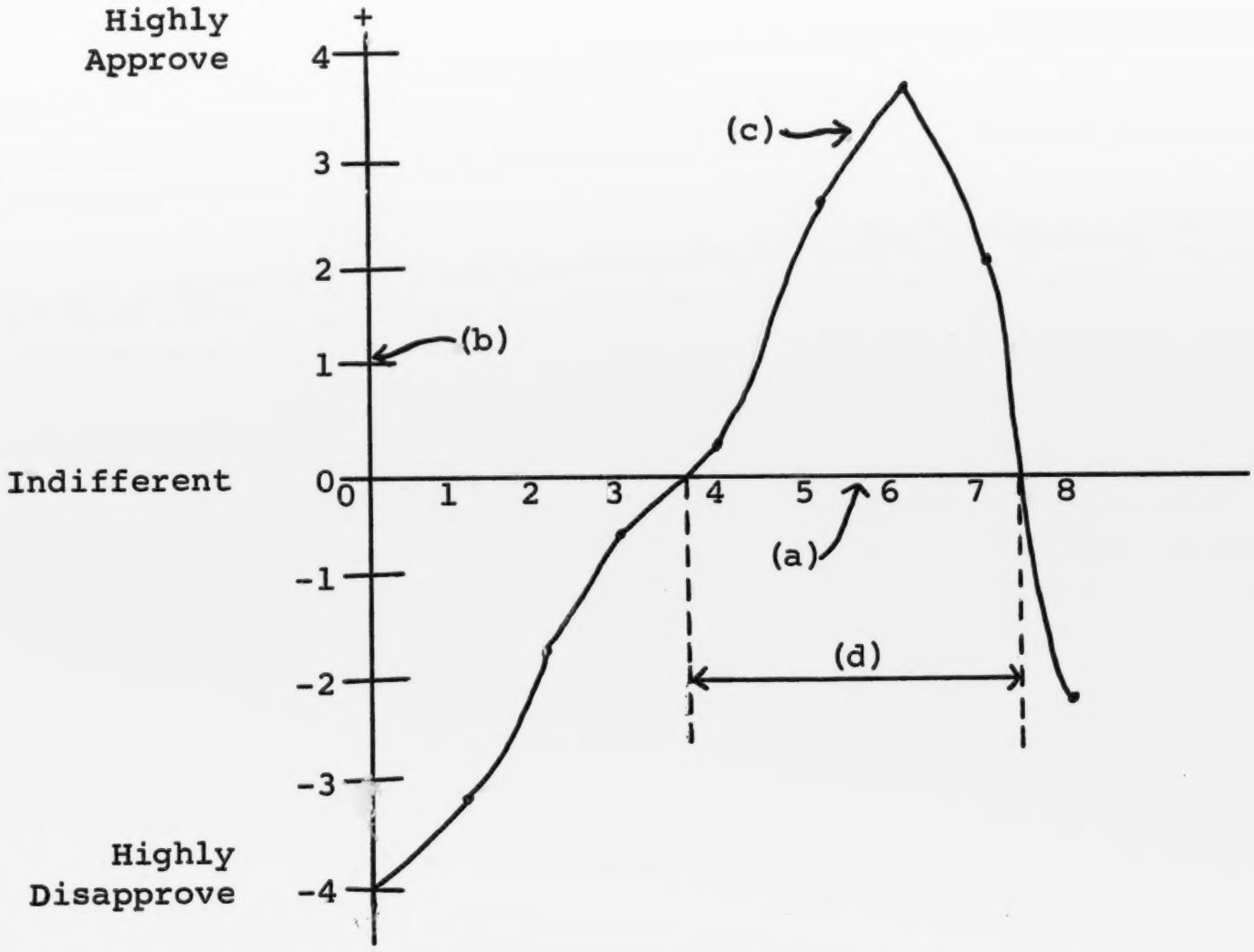

Figure 1. Schematic diagram showing the Return Potential Model for Representing Norms. (a) A behavior dimension; (b) an evaluation dimension; (c) a return potential curve, showing the distribution of approval-disapproval among the members of a group over the whole range of behavior; (d) the range of tolerable or approved behavior. (Reprinted, by permission of author, from Structural Characteristics of Norms by Jay Jackson, in The Dynamics of Instructional Groups, Fifty-ninth Yearbook, Part II, National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1960, Chicago, Illinois.)

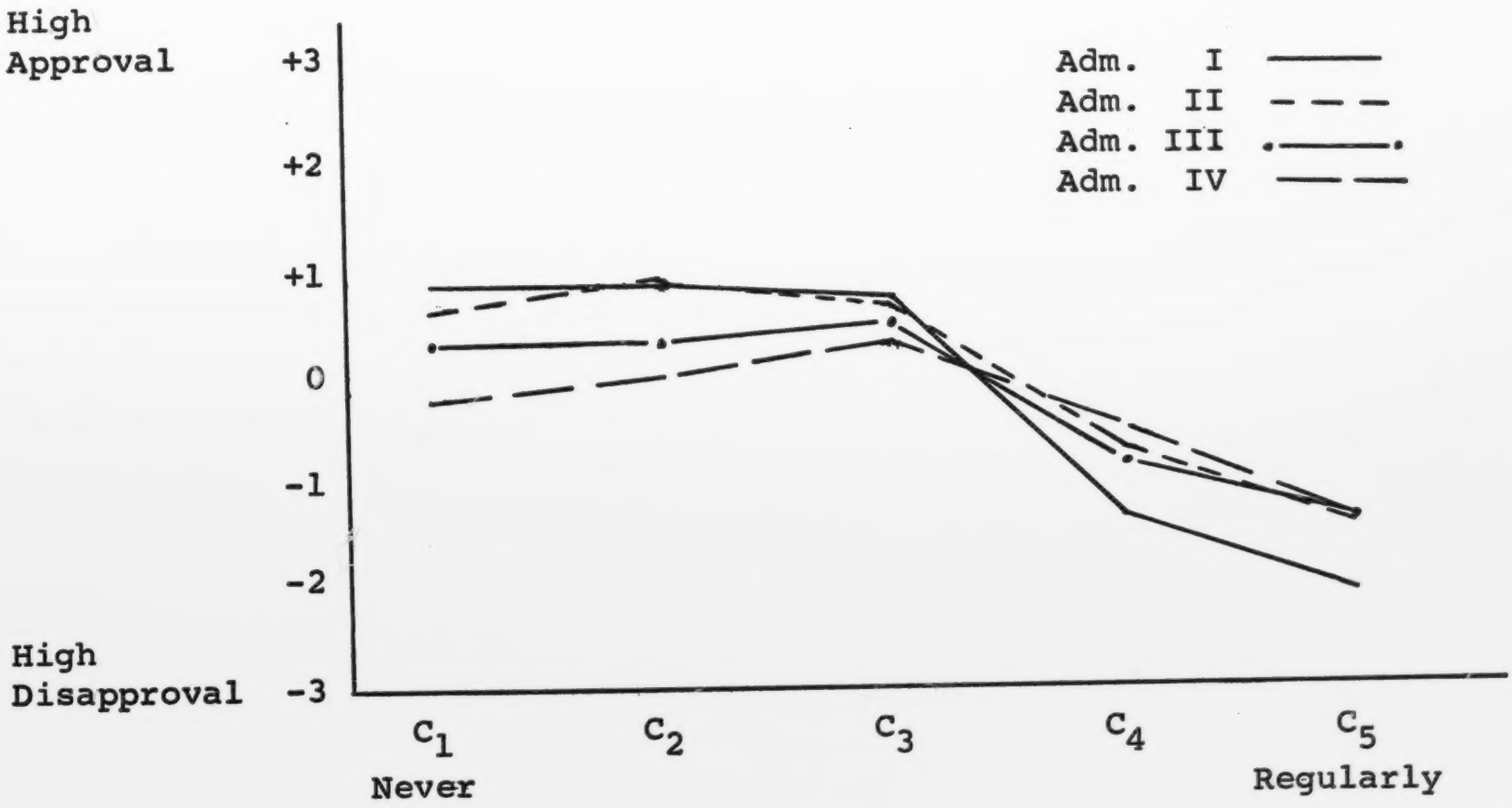

Figure 2. Card Playing

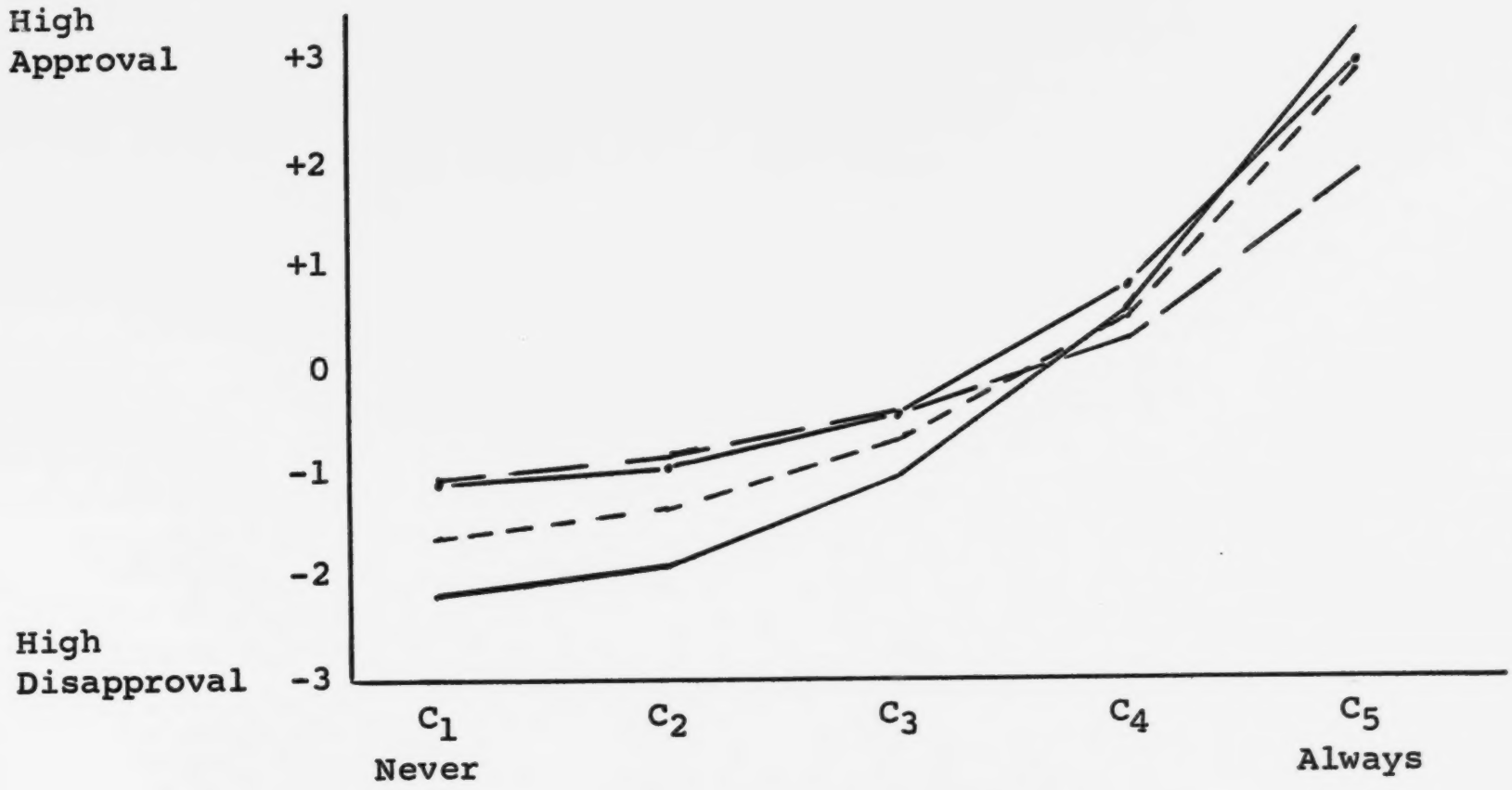

Figure 3. Sunday School Attendance

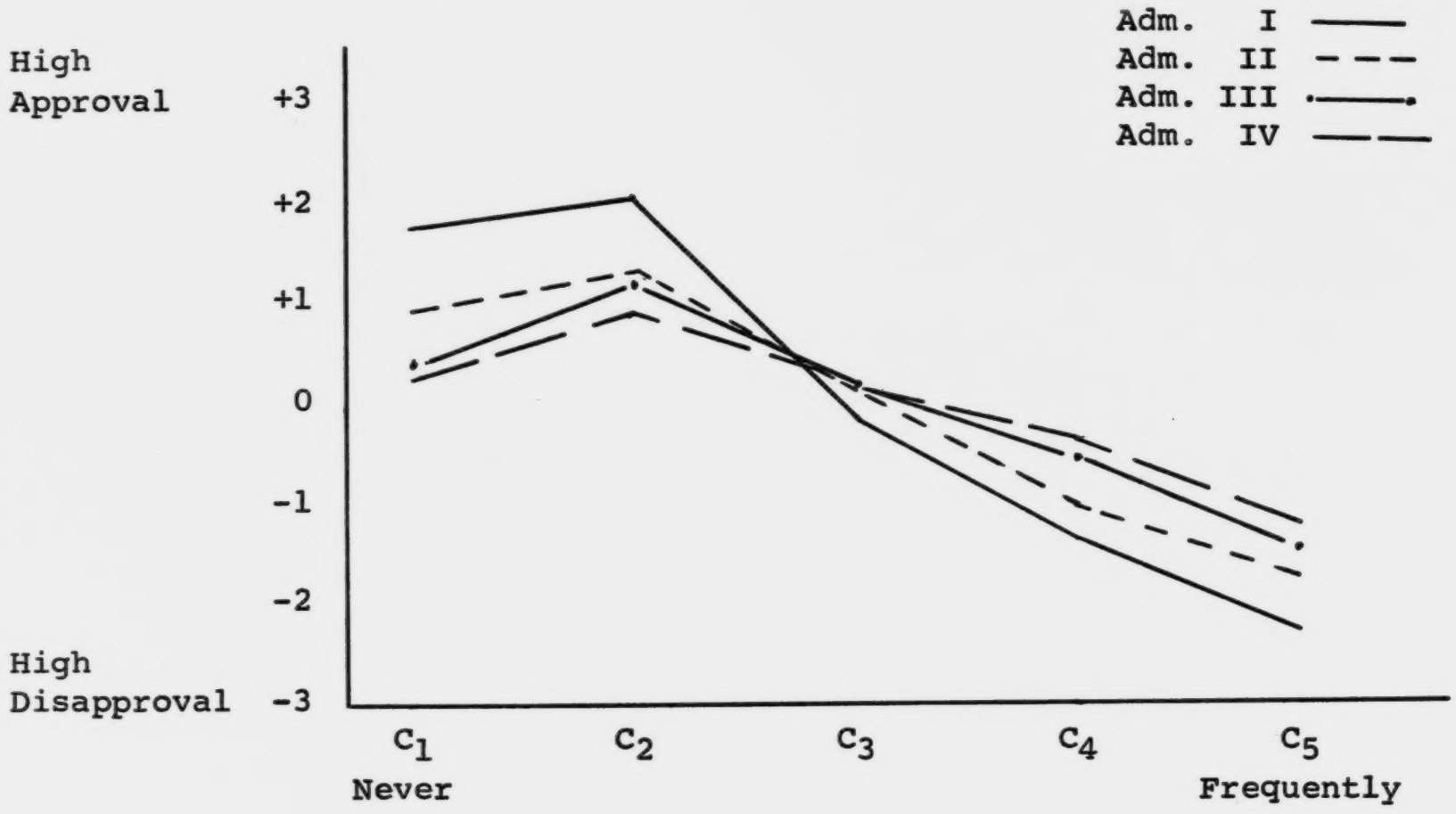

Figure 4. Dancing

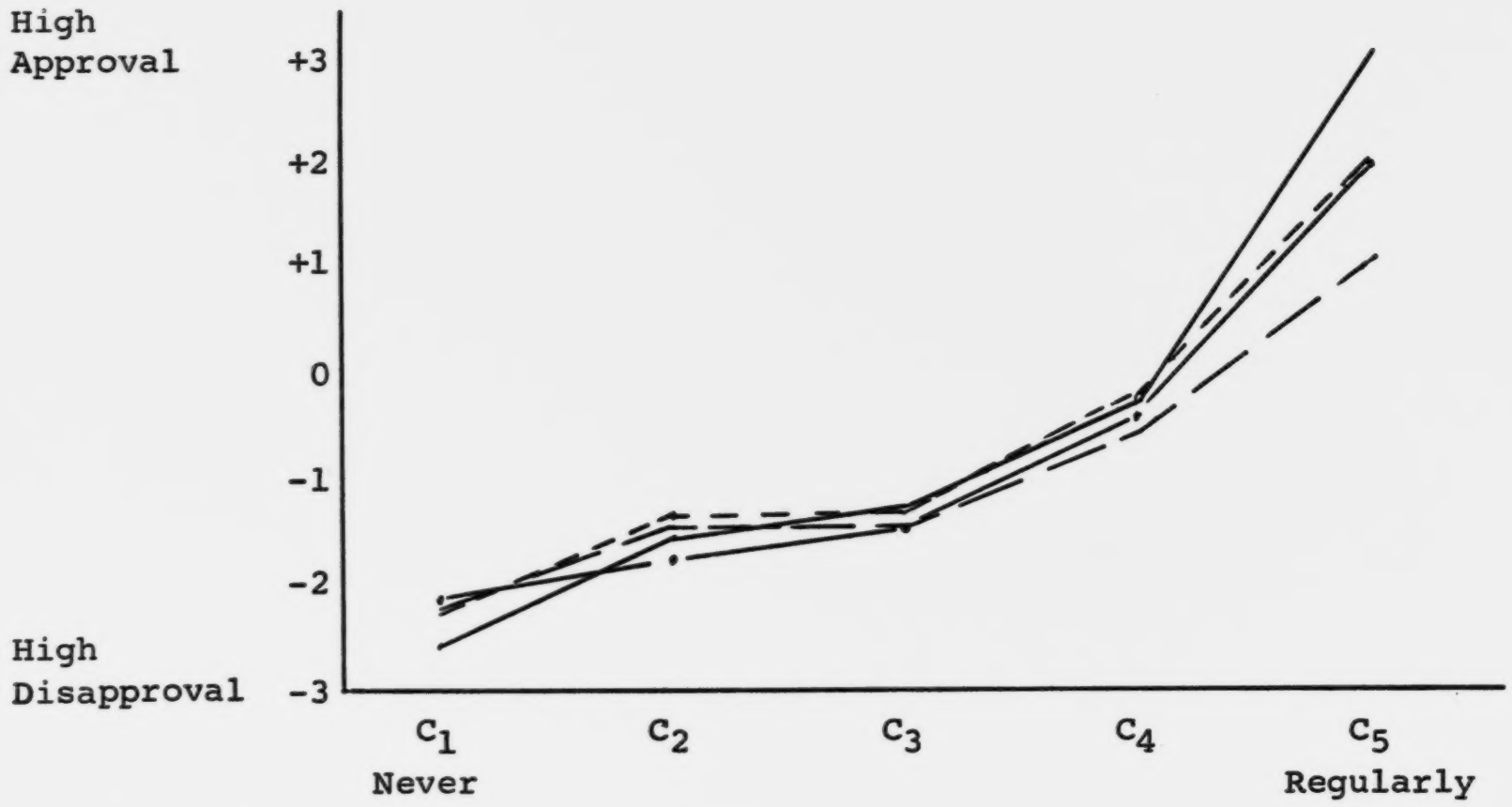

Figure 5. Devotions

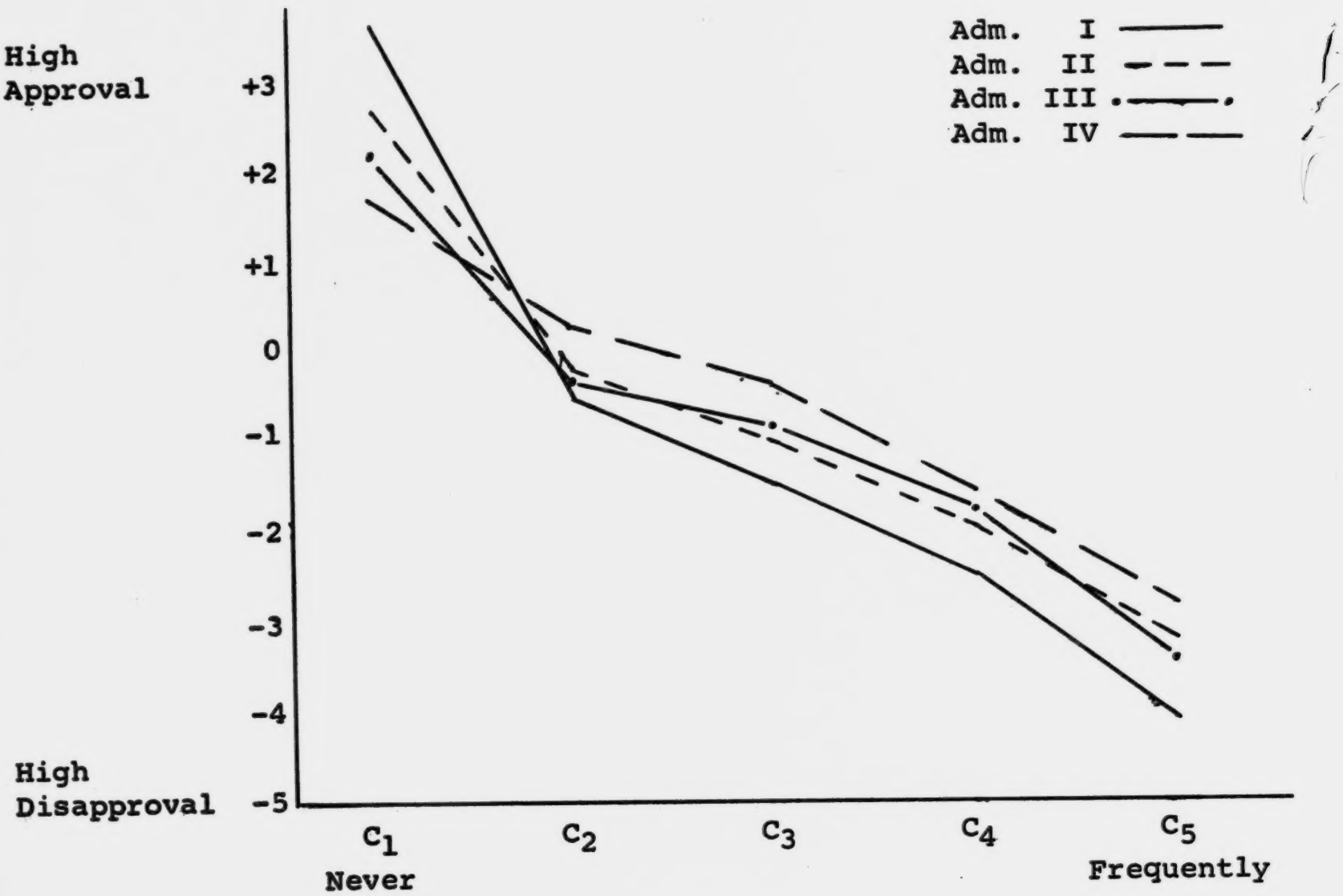

Figure 6. Drinking

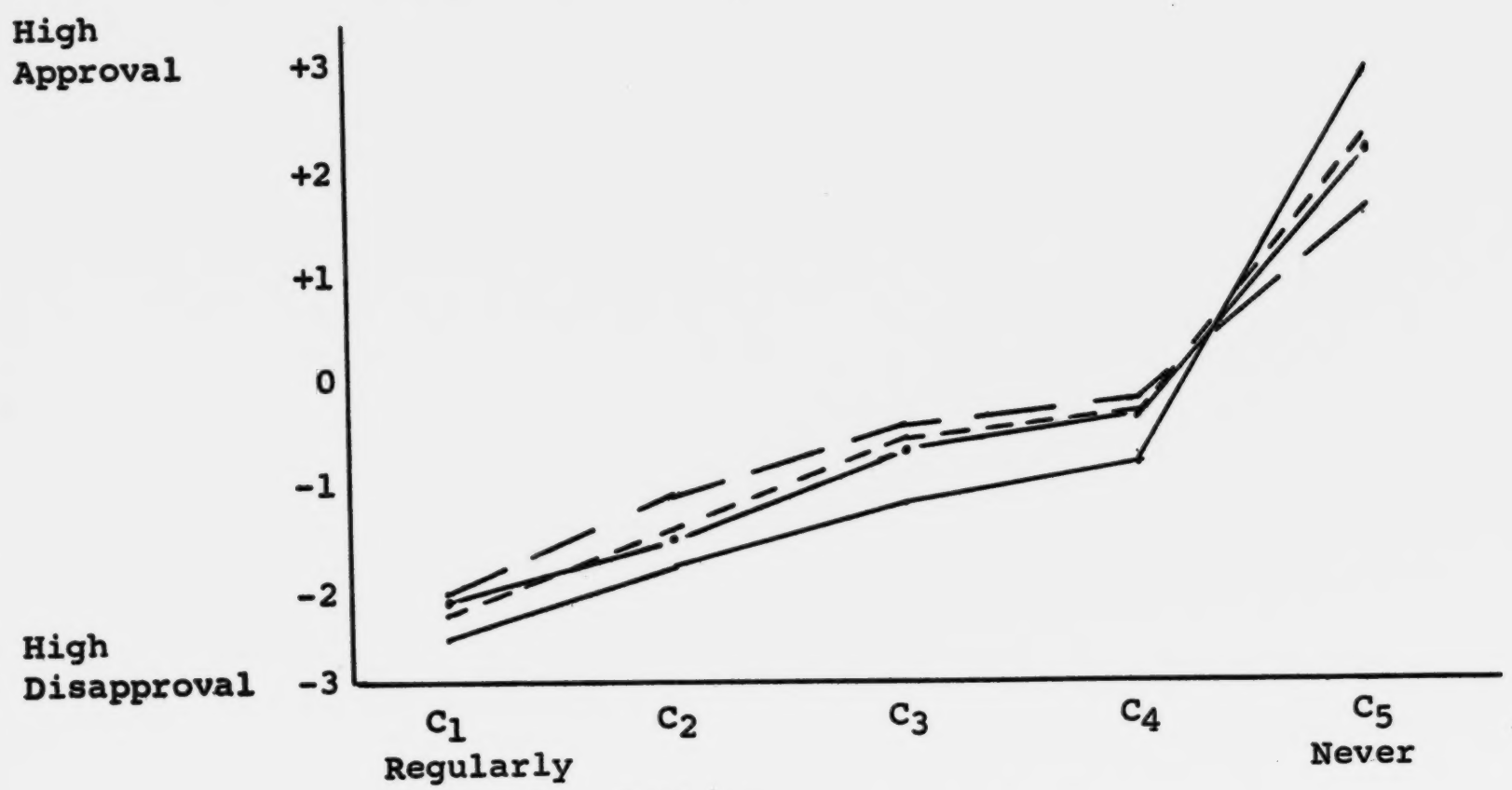

Figure 7. Smoking

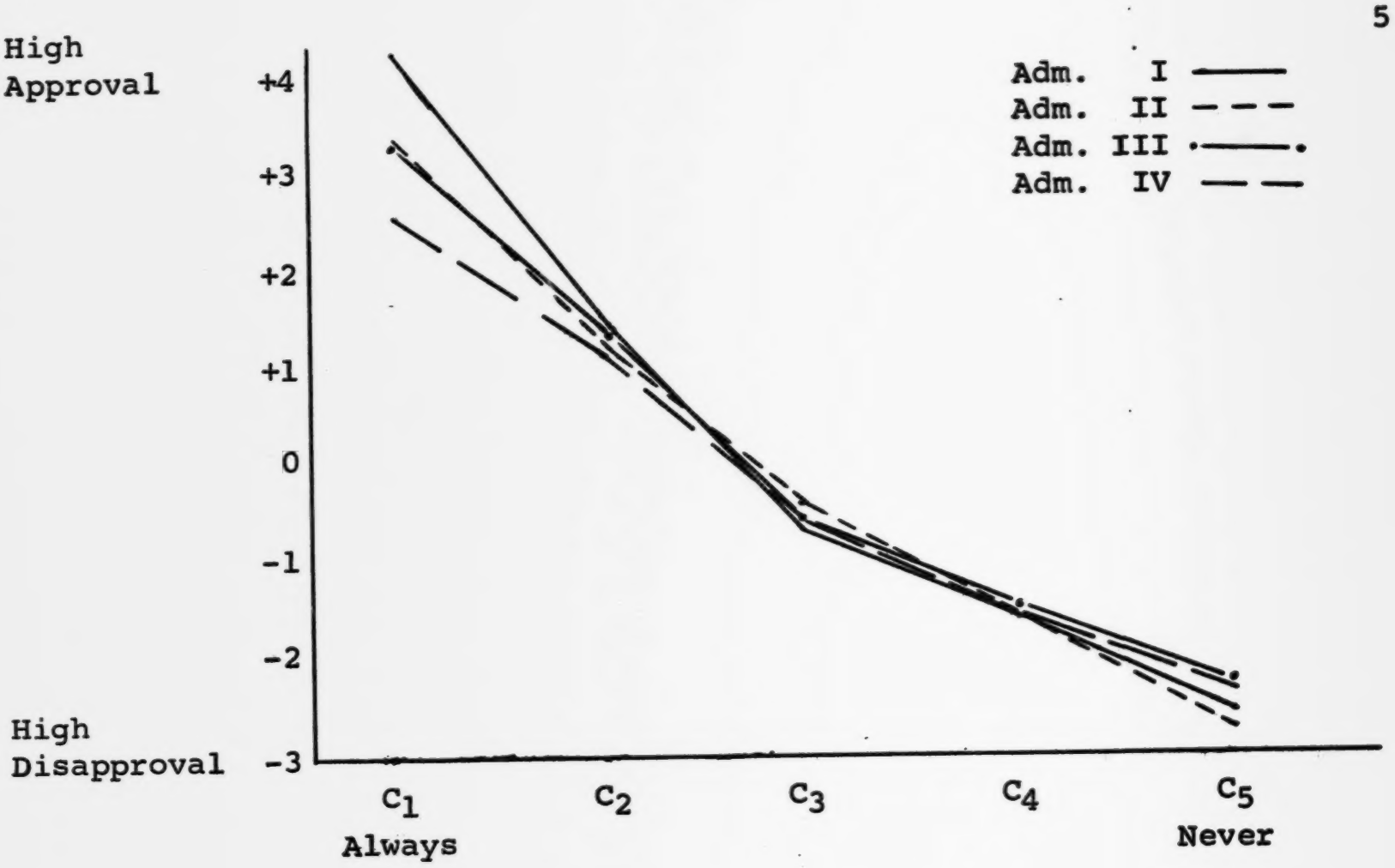

Figure 8. Church Attendance

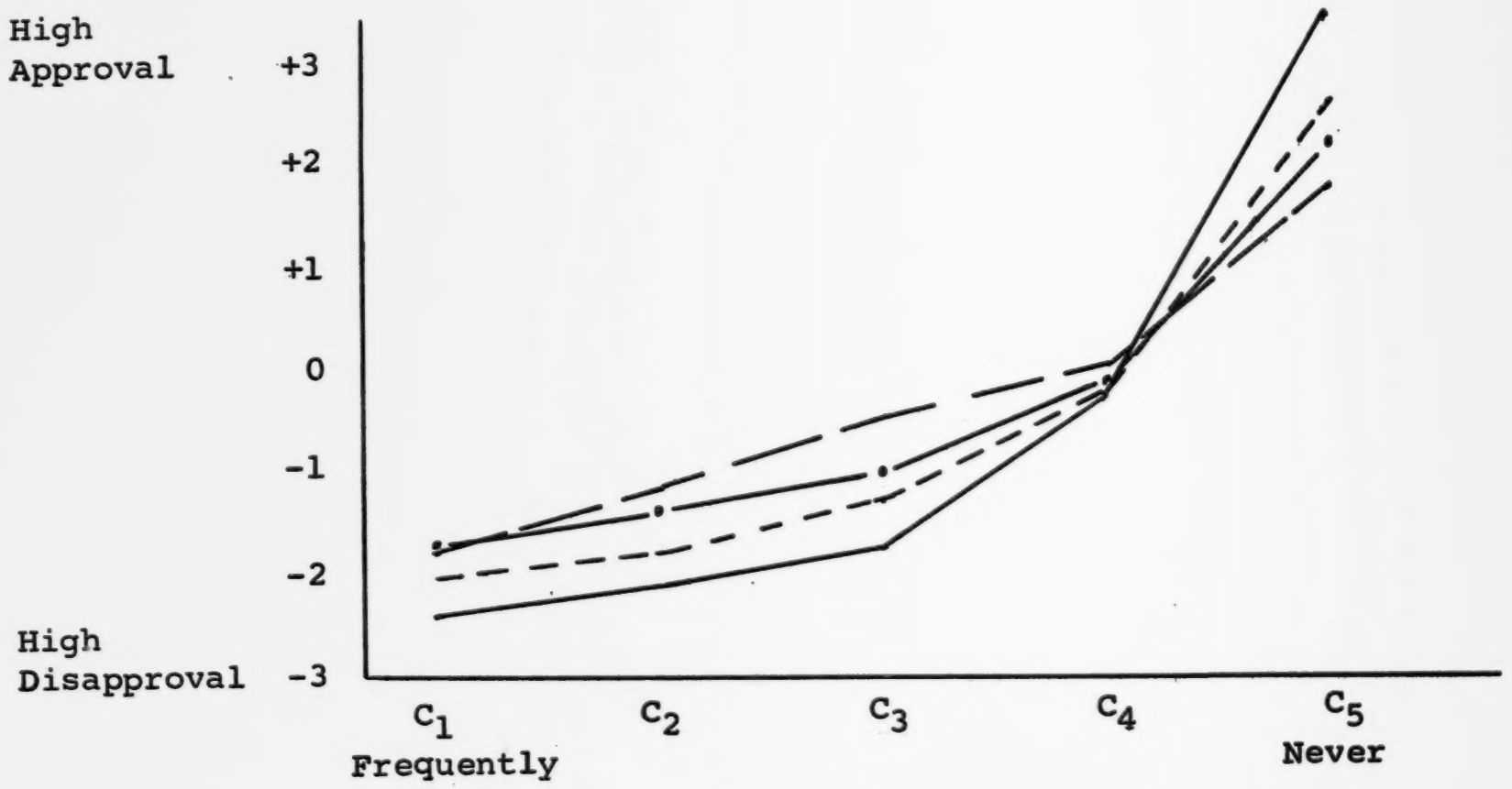

Figure 9. Swearing

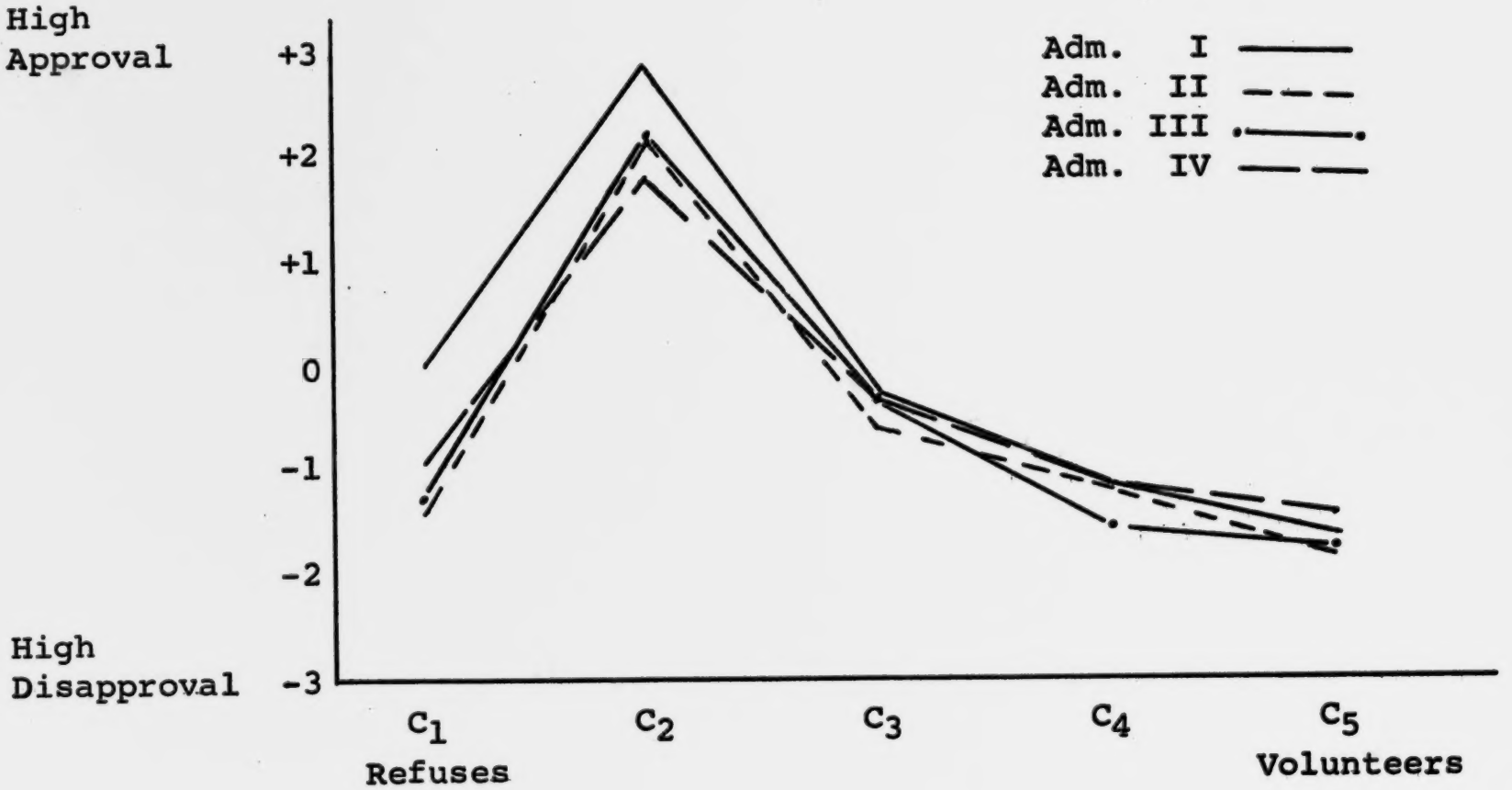

Figure 10. Conscientious Objection

Questionnaire Items Constituting the Behavior Norms Measure

Card Playing

A _____* College Student

1. Refuses to participate in any kind of card playing games.
2. Participates in card games using only other than regular playing cards (such as Rook).
3. Participates in card games using regular playing cards.
4. Occasionally joins groups in playing for money in card games.
5. Regularly plays for money in card games.

Sunday School Attendance

A _____ College Student

1. Almost never attends Sunday School.
2. Rarely attends Sunday School (once in six weeks or even less frequently).
3. Attends Sunday School irregularly (once or twice a month on the average).
4. Is occasionally absent from Sunday School.
5. Attends Sunday School every Sunday without fail.

Dancing

A _____ College Student

1. Refuses to participate in any form of dancing whatsoever.
2. Participates in Folk games and square dancing on the campus.
3. Engages in social dancing in private parties off the campus.
4. Occasionally engages in dancing in night clubs or public dance halls.
5. Frequently engages in dancing in night club or public dance halls.

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*Name of the college.

Devotions

A _____ College Student

1. Does not engage in any private Bible reading, prayer, or meditation.
2. Engages in private Bible reading, prayer, and meditation several times a year.
3. Engages in private Bible reading, prayer, and meditation about once a month.
4. Engages in private Bible reading, prayer, and meditation about once a week.
5. Has a time in each day set aside for private Bible reading, prayer, and meditation.

Drinking

A _____ College Student

1. Never drinks beer, wine, or liquor of any kind.
2. Agrees to drink some beer or wine only on special occasions.
3. Goes out for an occasional beer with some of his friends.
4. Frequently drinks beer, wine, or liquor in moderation.
5. Frequently drinks heavily of beer, wine, or liquor.

Smoking

A _____ College Student

1. Smokes regularly and heavily (one pack of cigarettes or more a day).
2. Smokes regularly but lightly (about one pack of cigarettes a week).
3. Occasionally purchases some cigarettes to smoke.
4. Smokes cigarettes given to him occasionally by his friends.
5. Never uses tobacco in any form or amount.

Church Attendance

A _____ College Student

1. Attends Sunday morning church services every Sunday without fail.
2. Is occasionally absent from Sunday morning church services.
3. Attends Sunday morning church services irregularly (once or twice a month on the average).
4. Rarely attends Sunday morning church services (once in six weeks or even less frequently).
5. Almost never attends Sunday morning church services.

Swearing

A _____ College Student

1. Frequently uses words such as "damn" or "hell" or some form of the name of God.
2. Occasionally uses some form of the name of God when under stress.
3. Occasionally uses words such as "damn" or "hell" when under stress.
4. Sometimes uses slang words such as "golly," "gosh," "darn," etc.
5. Does not curse, swear, or use slang word such as "golly," "gosh," "darn," etc. under any circumstances whatsoever.

Conscientious Objection

A _____ College Student

1. Refuses to register for the draft upon reaching the age of 18.
2. Requests a conscientious objector classification from his local draft board.
3. Decides to serve in the Armed Forces as a Non-combatant.
4. Raises no objection on religious grounds when he is inducted into the Armed Forces.
5. Volunteers to serve in the Armed Forces in a combatant role.

The Approval-Disapproval Scale

+5. I would approve and feel that this is the sort of person who ought to be selected for serving as President of the Student Body.

+4. I would approve and feel that this is the sort of person who ought to be selected for serving on important student committees.

+3. I would approve and feel like saying something nice to the person.

+2. I would approve and feel like discussing it with my friends.

+1. I would approve but probably not feel like saying anything.

0. I would feel indifferent about it.

-1. I would disapprove but probably not feel like saying anything.

-2. I would disapprove and feel like discussing the matter with my friends.

-3. I would disapprove and feel like saying something critical to the person.

-4. I would disapprove and feel like reporting it to student or faculty authorities.

-5. I would disapprove and feel that the person should be expelled from school.